

# AA,VV. BENAVENTE, Fran y SALVADÓ, Glòria (ed.), *Poéticas del gesto en el cine europeo contemporáneo*.

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An unforgettable statement about cinema used to be echoed in the classroom by Domènec Font: Cinema is the largest body factory the figurative arts had known since the antique statuary art. A deduction burnt into the memory of his students, and which returns, as a tribute, in an operation commanded by his disciples of the group CINEMA. Edited by Fran Benavente and Glòria Salvadó Corretger, *Poéticas del gesto en el cine europeo contemporáneo*, arises as a question: 'Is cinema an art of gesture?' (2013: 13).

We find ourselves towards a pioneer initiative, which interprets film memory based on cinema's condition as a gesture creator, ambitious both in its spirit and its shape. Twenty-three authors are invited to address the research of an entity perpetuated by cinema from its very origins, which encouraged the multiplicity of forms the French school, from Godard to Daney, forever recognized in the *histoire(s) du cinéma*. This is highlighted in the book, through the collective desire of finding a common base, without relinquishing the personal seal of each of its contributors.

The pictorial gesture mediates between the complexity of its message and the limitations of an art that is still lacking movement and word (Xavier Antich), as in antique pottery, the desire of preserving the beloved's image foreshadows cinema (Maria Adell) and relates to David Wark

Griffith's desire to film the face of Lillian Gish, and that of Jean Renoir to get closer to Sylvia Bataille's elation. The erotics of filming which Alain Bergala identifies as the initiation rites of modernity in cinema, share the mystery and the poetics of gestures inscribed in antique art images. And those gestures, Gonzalo de Lucas points out, 'always bring to light the motives that led the filmmaker to roll the shot' (2013:140). The artist as an operator of gestures, Barthes would say, that cinema metabolizes into diverse forms or survivals: the eloquence of the iconographic gesture drifted into visual motif (Jordi Balló), the popular gestural tradition transmigrated to the recurring gesture in the art of a society (Ivan Pintor), and the imperial gestures of expression by which cinema becomes a landscape of the look (Alan Salvadó) and an art of the hands. (Violeta Kovacsis). The confrontation of the authors towards this gestural magma that transmigrates from art to cinema touches an important idea: every gesture implies the origin and the mutation of its previous representations, and all its reproductions generate, not only perpetuations but also 'transformations of the imaginary and metamorphosis of history' (2013:19), as Benavente and Salvadó Corretger, following Aby Warburg and Giorgio Agamben referential framework, point out.

Due to this capacity to mutate, but as well to the capacity to survive and withstand, it is

necessary that the study of non conventional or insignificant gestures –those which according to Oksana Bulgakova reveal how the figures communicate with the body, or ultimately, are present– coexist with the analysis of the recurrent gesture, its inquiring and open nature, and its mechanisms over the bodies and the film movements that constitute film history. This is the intention posed in the second part of the book (*To create the gesture. Politics and memory of the body*) through the study of concrete gestures by authors such as Núria Bou and Xavier Pèrez (the inhibitory gesture), Manuel Garin and Albert Elduque (the meaning of the leap), Adrian Martin (the scream), Gino Frezza (the slap), Alain Bergala (the political gesture), Pilar Pedraza (the child's gesture of evil) and Carlos Losilla (the gesture of the return to life). If the role of the gestures as mediators between the visible and the invisible reminds of the implications of their very essence, with the essence of the construction of cinematic image itself, as shown in the first part of the book; then, their role as meaning receptacles, as 'specially dense crystallisations of a particular moment of history' (2013:42), reminds of their nature as memorial artefacts, which often overflows cinema aesthetics towards its political dimension.

Furthermore, the creation of the gesture produces a resistance, a reconstruction of something that has been lost and which cinema struggles to restore, as Agamben affirms. And this resistance, concerning film history or the history of the authors, often finds a vehicle of perpetuation through the body of the actor. Therefore, the need to trace along its inheritance, the historical moment of Shakespeare or Brecht (Santiago Fillol), or that of the soviet cinema as receptacle of the social revolution (Oksana Bulgakova); or to discern among all these branches, the existence of a real and least discussed poetics of the actor, proposed by Nicole Brenez whilst approaching the interpreter himself as the creator and inventor of his own gestures. Finally, Sergi Sánchez concludes this route, with the reinvention of gesture in the digital era based on the inquiry of its disfiguration;

if the eloquence of the first moving images was anticipated by the gestural sunrise of the pictorial Renaissance shown by Xavier Antich, then the latest cinema, facing the capitalism of virtuality and the nostalgia of reality, shows the necessity to 'profane the body of the gesture, to restore its power as instrument of resistance' (2013: 485).

Each chapter is a possibility in *Poéticas del gesto en el cine europeo contemporáneo*. A window to the internal journey of an spectator pursuing for the particular memory of a concrete gestural poetic. However, the presentation of all these negotiations altogether, threads a path of encounters; places in common and desires that find each other, maybe for the first time in European film studies, to point to an alternative methodology, a new light to approach the research of an entity in which, as in no other field, like Carles Roche states following Gumbrecht's thesis, 'something very simple becomes very obvious: one of the great duties of cinema (...) is to *produce presence*' (2013: 162). •

*Translated from the Spanish by Carolina Sourdis*